

It is good that we have this feast of the Holy Family just following the Christmas celebrations which tend to bring out the best – and the worst – in family life. The joys of being together, sharing food and gifts and laughter and, if it doesn't work out so well, the pain and the hurt of words spoken or not spoken, of rejection rather than acceptance, of self-centered decisions and misunderstandings. Whichever way or whatever “mix” of that was experienced at Christmas, we receive these sacred texts today to remind us to keep it in perspective and to strive, especially within the family, to live as the Lord dreamed us to live.

While the first reading we heard from Sirach reminds children to care for their parents, it is really focusing more on the adult children when roles can kind of reverse and the care-giving is often a giving back. But it starts with the parents, who obviously precede their children. Joseph, and Mary along with him, must protect Jesus from all that would befall him, represented by Herod's evil design. Even once they escape him, Joseph determines it is still not safe to return because of Herod's son – did Archelaus learn the same fear from his father, Herod, that someone might try to take his power away from him? We learn from our parents.

The role of Joseph and Mary was to provide love and security to Jesus, to teach him how to respect and care for family and neighbor. Many families in the world still live in fear of

physical harm, whether by violence or famine or some such thing and so, they, like the Holy Family, do flee their homelands for survival, parents trying to protect their children. While we may not have a Herod threatening our children in this country, we do have many other things that bring the same danger, things that break families and devastate children. Addictions of the parents or of the children can lead to such destruction among the innocent. The power of the internet and social media to do good, has an equally powerful ability to do evil - to destroy reputations and objectify people for personal pleasure or ridicule or even to incite violence. Such things are as dangerous as Herod.

The Gospel of Matthew early on is clearly setting up the clues to the reader that Jesus is the “new Moses”. As Pharaoh ordered the killing of all newborn males, so does Herod. As Moses led his people out of slavery in Egypt, so Jesus comes out of Egypt and will lead his people out of slavery to sin. But that leadership only can happen if we choose to follow. We heard from the Book of Sirach in the first reading, which sets up first, the duties owed to God, then to parents, recognizing that parents can be a source of blessing to their children or a source of shame. Likewise, children have the same capabilities. Sirach attempts to reveal the power of these relationships. We can never overstate the influence of the home, including no home at all, to shape us into the men and women we become.

St. Paul wraps it all up

so beautifully for us in that part of the letter to the Colossians we heard: *Put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness – and over all these, put on love.* If we can live and teach these gifts in our families, we have the foundation we need to hear the Gospel. If we lack those things, then how we hear and how we live the gospel will be twisted or maybe will never leave this room at all.

I know many families look very different today than Ben Sirach may have imagined. And that is for a variety of reasons that cannot be summed up in a homily or dismissed in a conversation. But if whatever that family looks like lives out those qualities, it will be on its way to sharing the gospel. And, as Paul concludes: *“whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*